



# Voices from the Gaps

# Pat Mora

“

*Bi-lingual, Bi-cultural,  
able to slip from “How’s life?”  
to “Me’stan volviendo loca,”  
able to sit in a paneled office  
drafting memos in smooth English,  
able to order in a fluent Spanish  
at a Mexican restaurant,  
American but hyphenated,  
viewed by Anglos as perhaps exotic,  
perhaps inferior, definitely different,  
perhaps inferior, definitely different,  
(their eyes say, “You may speak  
Spanish but you’re not like me”  
an American to Mexicans  
a Mexican to Americans. . .*

— “Legal Alien,” (Chants)

”



## Quick Facts

- \* Born in 1942
- \* Chicana educator, radio show host, poet, and children’s book author

## Biography

Pat Mora was born on January 19, 1942, in El Paso, Texas, but grew up speaking mostly Spanish at home, with the influence of her four grandparents who had come to Texas from Mexico in the early part of the century. Mora received her B.A. in 1963 from Texas Western College and her M.A. from the University of Texas at El Paso in 1967. Mora held teaching positions at the secondary and college levels. She was also the host of a radio show called “Voices: The Mexican-American in Perspective.” After her divorce in 1981, Mora left teaching and went on to write children’s books and poetry, working diligently to maintain the pride and respect she felt should be invested into the preservation of Mexican-American literature.

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# Pat Mora

## Biography continued

Mora is the recipient of numerous awards, some of which include the Creative Writing Award from the National Association for Chicano Studies in 1983; Women Artists and Writers of the Southwest poetry award, 1984. She also received Southwest Book Awards from Border Regional Library for her collections of poetry--in 1985, for *Chants*, and in 1987, for *Borders*. In 1988, she was named to the *El Paso Herald-Post* Writers Hall of Fame.

In 1997, Pat Mora and her illustrator, Raul Colon, received the third annual Tomas Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award for their book *Tomas and the Library Lady*. The significance of the award is to honor and celebrate the authors and illustrators of books that exemplify the lives of Mexican-Americans in the Southwest.

Pat Mora has also been recognized for her activist stance when it comes to her determination to bring about the existence of a national day, set for April 30th, to be designated as Dia de Los Ninos, Dia de Los Libros (Children's Day, Book Day), to celebrate language and bilingual literacy. Mora's efforts and successes have spurred the enthusiasm of institutions towards celebrating the diversity and the value of language and how it unites us through literature.

Few women can claim Pat Mora's diversity in writing. Catering to different audiences (children as well as adults), Mora's spare but evocative language spans several genres (poetry, fiction, and nonfiction) and two languages (English meshed with Spanish words and phrases). Pat Mora has received critical acclaim for her works that portray the cultural diversity and visual beauty of the Southwest as well as the theme of identity, especially that of woman and her connection with the various forms of the "earth mother."

Woven throughout her poetry in such collections as *Chants* (1984), *Borders* (1986), and *Communion* (1991) are themes drawn from her life experience as a bi-lingual, bi-cultural woman from the Southwest desert. Through the portrayal of her native traditions as well as the physical surroundings of desert, Mora gives voice to both herself and her people. Additionally, in *Nepantla: Essays from the Land in the Middle* (1993), Mora makes it clear that she not only recognizes herself as having come from such a physical place, the Tex-Mex borderlands, but also from the cultural place of a Mexican-American.



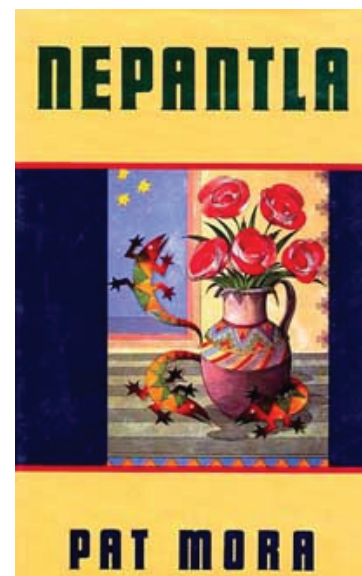
# Pat Mora

## Biography continued

Because the elements of the Southwest are so prevalent in her work, Mora has been labeled a “regional” writer. Though she has expanded her view to include women’s experiences from other parts of the world, she agrees that her regional focus is important. Writers such as Mora empower Hispanics through a celebration of native traditions, which lie at the heart of their identity. “For a variety of complex reasons,” Mora explains, “anthologized American literature does not reflect the ethnic diversity of the United States. I write, in part because Hispanic perspectives need to be part of our literary heritage; I want to be part of the validation process. I also write because I am fascinated by the pleasure and power of words.”

In *The Rainbow Tulip* (1999), a children’s book based on her mother’s childhood, Mora tells of a Mexican American immigrant child who feels caught between her Spanish home and the English speaking world outside. At home she’s Estelita. At school she’s Stella. When the girls at school dress as tulips for the May Day parade, Stella decides that her petals will be a variety of colors and learns that it’s okay to be different. Mora celebrates the diversity of the bi-cultural experience, in particular Chicana women who struggle to be accepted as persons of dual heritage.

Perhaps the most poignant of her works, Mora’s family memoir, *House of Houses* (1997), allows the reader to meet each member of her extended, often eccentric family in person, learning of their lives in first person narratives. Her complex and dramatic family history, however, comprises more than personal reminiscences, it also embraces resonant aspects of Mexican American history. Mora recounts her family’s traumatic exit from Mexico to escape the violence of Pancho Villa and their struggles to begin new lives in another country.





# Pat Mora

## Biography continued

To anchor her psychologically rich, dramatic, and touching generational tale, Mora uses the image of a house--the house of houses--during a single year. The fruitful metaphor allows her to dwell on the bright beauty of flowers, birds, trees, emblems of the loving legacy of her family. Mora's stories communicate her love of the Southwest as well as her ongoing advocacy to show society the value of the bi-cultural Mexican American heritage. She uses magical realism, multiple narrators, a sparse eloquence of speech, and an intermingling of Spanish phrases to depict the thoughts and emotions of her characters.

In fall 1999, Pat Mora was the Garrey Carruthers Chair in Honors, Distinguished Visiting Professor at the University of New Mexico. During 2000, Mora is scheduled for a series of conferences throughout the country. The most notable is "Dia de Los Ninos, Dia de Los Libros," on April 30th. In addition, her latest book, *My Own True Name: New and Selected Poems for Young Adults, 1984-1999*, published in May 2000, is a collection of 15 years of work in which Mora addresses bi-cultural life and family from an adult perspective, combined with such universal experiences as the pleasures of eating pizza and mango, and the cultural significance of both. Not only is Mora expanding her writing, she is also involved as a consultant on U.S.-Mexico youth exchanges, as a museum director, and as an administrator at her alma mater, the University of Texas at El Paso.

## Selected Bibliography

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*This Big Sky* (1998).

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# Pat Mora

## Selected Bibliography continued

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*The Gift of the Poinsettia* (1995).  
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